

EDITORIAL: City's creativity deserves support

Seeking savings a good idea

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In trying times, people and businesses often have to get creative to make ends meet. The same should hold true for local government.

That's why we commend city leaders for thinking outside the box in considering two initiatives to cut costs and generate public revenue. Ultimately, neither one may work out, but it's nice to see signs that those at the top of the City-County Building are looking for ways to save taxpayers money.

One idea involves requesting new proposals for the management of 12 of Indianapolis' 13 municipal golf courses (see story, page 1). The new contracts will require operators to pay for \$5.7 million in needed capital improvements at the courses.

With capital-improvement costs out of the way, the city will be able to spend money it gets from the course-management contracts on a park system that needs \$26 million in infrastructure upgrades, according to Mayor Greg Ballard's administration.

On its surface, the golf-course idea sounds like it could be a winner if the city can attract operators during a difficult time for the golf industry. The plan could improve courses without increasing greens fees. That's a win-win situation for taxpayers and golfers as long as service levels are maintained or improved.

In another effort detailed by IBJ last week, city officials are considering several proposals to milk more money out of Indianapolis' 4,000 parking meters. The city also is seeking ideas for raising more cash from parking garages and surface lots.

Possibilities include a long-term management lease to a private firm and/or modernized meters that would let users pay with credit cards or even via a cell phone. The hope is to boost the \$3 million in annual revenue the city already makes from meters.

Obviously, the devil will be in the details. Any plan must avoid significant price hikes or inconveniences that will turn people away rather than attract them to the area.

Parking concerns are an issue often cited by people reluctant to spend time downtown. Any parking plan the city chooses must alleviate those concerns, not make them worse.

These are just two of what could be several creative revenue-generating plans by the city. They come on top of earlier proposals to sell off unneeded assets and consider sponsorships or naming-rights deals for city properties.

Many of these ideas have emerged from the Indianapolis Infrastructure Advisory Commission, a small group of business and academic leaders formed by Ballard in February to drum up recommendations and solutions to the city's long-term needs.

We urge Ballard and the city to continue looking for more unconventional ways to save money and generate funds. Any idea that gives taxpayers a break in today's economy is welcome and worth considering. •